

sively and eliminate them more rapidly than adults," says the report.

Some scientists, such as Jerry Taylor, director of natural resource studies at the Cato Institute, disagree. In an editorial in the *New York Times*, Taylor cited studies by EPA that found of 86,000 food samples, 81% contained no pesticide residues. Taylor also

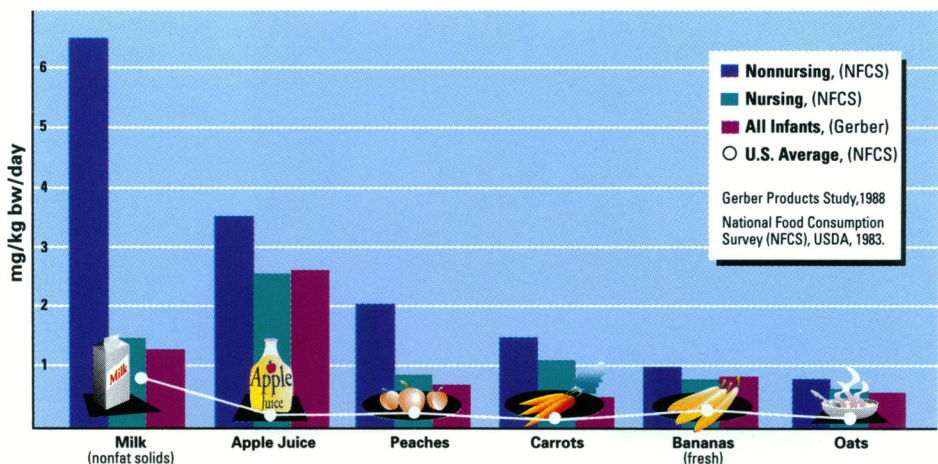
questioned the practice of basing conclusions on animal tests. "Given that animal laboratory tests have found half of all natural chemical compounds to be carcinogenic, . . . one must question why NRC or the federal government continues to rely on a practice that is based on . . . assumptions," stated Taylor.

Nevertheless, federal agencies and the Clinton administration were quick to react to the NAS report. Just before the report was released, three federal agencies announced that they would work together to reduce the use of pesticides. The White House issued a statement emphasizing its commitment "to reducing the risks to people and the environment that are associated with pesticides."

Senator Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vermont), head of the Agriculture Committee, said the Clinton administration was ready to reverse the policy of recent decades and try to reduce the amount of pesticides used by farmers. Senator Leahy said that because of the president's support, Congress may pass a bill within the next year requiring alternative means of pest control such as using beneficial insects or enriching the soil.

The two pesticide bills in Congress, one offered by Democrats and one by Republicans, both would require EPA to calculate risks and permit pesticides on the market only if they pose a negligible risk. The Democratic bill, authored by Senator Edward Kennedy and Congressman Henry Waxman, defines "negligible risk" as causing no more than one cancer or other harmful effect per million people during a lifetime of exposure. The Republican bill asks EPA to weigh the economic benefit of a pesticide against its health risks.

The government now considers the amount of pesticide an "average" person might ingest. The \$1.1 million NAS report, which was requested by Congress five years ago and was three years overdue, points out that risk calculations do not consider pesticides from sources other than



Starting young. Infant intake of pesticides on raw agricultural commodities far exceeds the national average.

food, such as drinking water and treatment of lawns and golf courses. "Pesticides applied in legal amounts on the farm, and present in legal amounts on food, can still lead to unsafe amounts," said Philip Landrigan, chair of the committee that wrote the report.

To improve understanding of how pesticides affect children, NAS urged federal regulators to use immature animals to test toxicity, conduct food consumption surveys for children, increase sampling of pesticides in foods consumed by children, and consider all sources of exposure to pesticides.

Underwater Developments

Scientists will pump liquid oxygen to the bottom of Onondaga Lake in Syracuse, New York, to determine how mercury and other toxic chemicals are released from sediments.

An estimated 165,00 pounds of mercury was discharged into the lake by Allied Chemical between 1946 and 1970. Some 7 million cubic yards of sediments in Onondaga Lake are now contaminated with mercury. Fishing was banned in the lake from 1970 to 1986, and the New York Health Department still warns people not to eat fish caught in the five-mile-long lake or its tributaries.

Scientists will construct two corrals in the lake: one corral will have oxygen added every other day; no oxygen will be added to the second one. Water, fish, and plants will not enter the corrals during the experiment. Crews have started constructing an elaborate pumping station to bring oxygen to the lake's deepest point, about 60 feet below the surface. Researchers will record changes in water chemistry by sampling water from a 25-foot wide plastic tube extending from the surface to the bottom of the lake.

"We're really looking more at the water chemistry than anything else," said Chandler Rowell, staff scientist for the Onondaga Lake

Management Conference. "It's basically to see if by adding oxygen to the lake, you'll get any contamination from the sediments."

Scientists have theorized that a lack of oxygen at the bottom of lakes plays a role in contamination, although they differ on whether the effect of oxygen is positive or negative.

"Half the literature says mercury is released when there's no oxygen," said Jay Babin, a Canadian scientist involved in the experiment. "The other half says it happens when there is oxygen."

The experiment will cost about \$200,000 and is being paid for by a congressionally established panel to devise and coordinate cleanup of the lake, which is one of the nation's most polluted. The experiment will continue through October.

On the Carpet

The stalemate between consumers who contend that their carpet is making them sick and an industry which has long denied any evidence of carpet culpability may soon be over. In a hearing June 11, the Georgia-based Carpet and Rug Industry (CRI) told the House Government Operations Subcommittee on Environment, Energy and Natural Resources that it would fund comprehensive health research on carpet chemicals, including volatile organic chemicals, and consider using labels to inform consumers of potential health effects.

EPA sources say the industry pledge defused a lot of the controversy that arose from toxicology tests conducted last October by Anderson Laboratories, Inc. of Dedham, Massachusetts. Results of those tests purported to demonstrate that fumes from ordinary carpet can kill mice and may cause adverse health effects in humans. However, both EPA and CRI attempts to replicate the tests failed to produce the same results, and questions about differences in protocols have been raised.

These tests were not the only impetus for the industry pledge. In 1991, 27 state attorney generals petitioned the Consumer Product Safety Commission to require that information labels be affixed to carpet products and that informational brochures be distributed at the point of sale. Industry has now indicated it would consider voluntarily taking such action.